



Five generations of the Gambill family
'Pass the Paddle' at Farmer's Fish Camp near Sparta,
North Carolina.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE INITIATIVE

Building Bridges with Other River Initiatives

RIVERS 2000 – *Pass the Paddle* A National Tour of America's Rivers

On Saturday, October 7, 2000, *Pass the Paddle*, a celebration of rivers and watersheds, completed its national tour when it returned to Washington, DC, at the Anacostia Community Boathouse and the Capital Rowing Club on the Anacostia River. *Pass the Paddle* was inaugurated on April 1, 2000, on the other side of DC, making its first “pass” from DC to Virginia, across the Potomac River from Thompson’s Boathouse to the river steps of the Pentagon.

This first passage marked stage one of the official Rivers 2000 Paddle’s journey across America, following some of our Nation’s most beautiful and historically significant rivers. The paddle visited the AHR’s of the Detroit, Hanalei, Hudson, Blackstone, Connecticut, Mississippi, New, Rio Grande, and the Willamette. The paddle traveled rivers that form state boundaries and rivers that flow from state to state, as well as those that form US borders with Canada and Mexico.

Local, state and national officials and individuals engaged in river conservation from all 50 states passed the paddle as a way to highlight the importance of rivers and watersheds.

Pass the Paddle events stressed that forests, croplands, wetlands, rangelands, and riparian areas are the building blocks of watersheds, and that public and private stewardship of these natural resources is the first step toward clean water and pollution prevention. The national tour underscored the shared responsibility for protecting these extraordinary resources.

The final paddle was signed by officials from local organizations, as it was at every river crossing event, and was presented to the American Heritage Rivers Task Force for delivery to Vice President Al Gore. Once he signs the paddle, it will be displayed at the Smithsonian Institution.

Pass the Paddle was organized by Rivers 2000, a broad and diverse coalition led by the River Management Society, a non-profit professional organization dedicated to the protection and management of North America’s river resources.

Community Building

EL DIA DEL RIO – A Celebration of River Communities

Mexican and American volunteers from over 32 communities along the Rio Grande demonstrate their unified commitment to protect the Rio Grande during “El Dia del Rio,” a weeklong international celebration, sponsored by the Rio Grande – Rio Bravo Basin Coalition. President Clinton gave special recognition to the event through the American Heritage Rivers initiative by reiterating how important their river is in giving them a unique sense of community.

In Laredo, Texas 500 volunteers gathered to improve the mile long El Paso del Indio nature trail. Weeds, trash and other debris were cleared from the trail, and native plants, trees and flowers were planted. In Mexico, volunteers in Nuevo Laredo coordinated a five kilometer clean up along the Rio Bravo and distributed trash bags, coloring books and brochures to local schools and riverside communities. At the end of the celebration, Mayor Betty Flores of Laredo, Texas and Nuevo Laredo Mayor Horacio Garza signed a proclamation to “join forces” to take care of the Rio Grande. The signing occurred in the middle of the International Bridge I, which connects both communities.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 15, 1999

Warm greetings to all those gathered along the Rio Grande -- both in the United States and in Mexico -- to celebrate El Dia del Rio and the rich heritage of your magnificent river.

Our continent has been blessed with abundant natural resources, including lands, rivers, and forests of breathtaking beauty and a rich variety of wildlife. In recent decades, we have recognized that these natural treasures have a limited ability to absorb the impact of human actions without being harmed or changed. We realize that we must take action to protect our fragile and precious environment if we are to ensure its survival.

That is why my Administration strongly supports local initiatives toward an improved and sustainable stewardship of our rivers. My designation of the Rio Grande as one of the 14 American Heritage Rivers was intended to recognize and support efforts such as yours.

I commend all those participating in El Dia del Rio for your dedication to the preservation and wise management of the Rio Grande, a river that has the distinction of being both a treasured resource and an international boundary. Each of you can take great pride in knowing that your conservation efforts are helping to protect this river's natural splendor for generations to come.

Best wishes to all for a wonderful celebration.



Outreach/Education for the Next Generation

"The People of the Border region realize the importance of the historic Rio Grande River, as the primary source of drinking water as well as an international boundary and major trade corridor between the United States and Mexico. The partnerships created by the American Heritage River initiative will enhance this political and economic importance while providing a safe and healthy environment for the present and future residents of the Border region."

Mayor Elizabeth G. Flores,
Laredo, Texas



Youth participate in Anacostia Watershed Society public education program.



Teacher receiving instruction at the Connecticut River Education Initiative (CREI) summer institute - CREI is an ongoing AHR program that encourages and supports K-12 teachers who are seeking to integrate the river into their interdisciplinary and technology based curriculum.





Prize winning artwork of Rio Grande, by 17 year old Jose Riveria of El Paso, Texas.

Children's Art Contest

One of the highlights of the AHR public outreach effort is sponsorship of a student art contest to cultivate interest in rivers. Schools along designated rivers submitted artwork in three age categories – elementary, middle, and high schools. More than 70 submissions from schools along the 14 American Heritage rivers were submitted, demonstrating a spectacular showing of creativity, inspiration, pride and an awareness of the cultural heritage and socioeconomic issues associated with each river. Each unique piece of art exhibited a defined viewpoint of the importance of the river.



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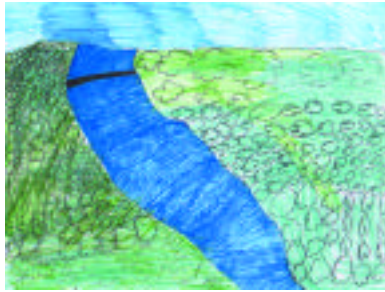
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Award winning crayon drawing of the Anacostia River by 9 year old Portia Nicholson, J.O. Wilson Elementary School, Washington.



Award winning drawing of the New River by 13 year old Jacob Lee Bledsoe of Fries Middle School in Fries, Virginia.



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New River Basin by students of Independence Elementary School 01 Kayla Jones 02 Sarah Silva-Alvarez 03 Mayia Jeremy 04 Laura Osborne 05 Marie Johnson
 06 David Guynes 07 Justin Huff 08 Stephanie Barber 09 Amanda Crockett 10 Michael Osborne 11 Marie Tarvid 12 Ashley Haga
 13 Heather McAllister 14 Heather Marella **New River Basin by students of Fries Middle School** 15 Delmas Kirby 16 Pedro Sanchez

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE INITIATIVE



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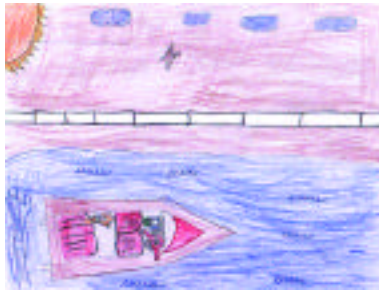
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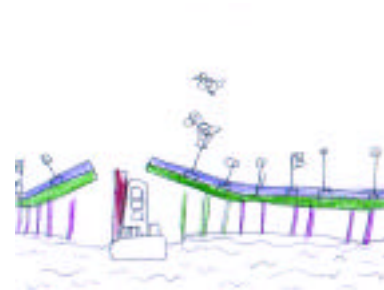
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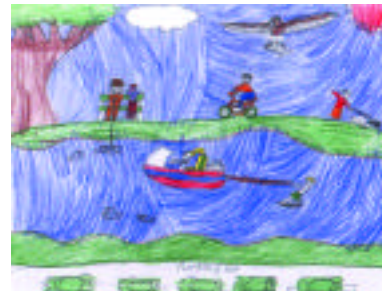
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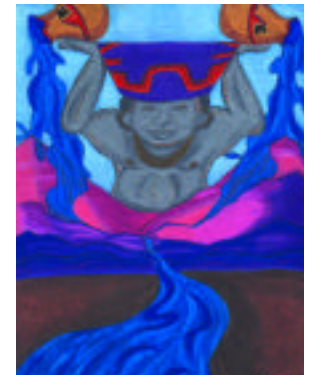
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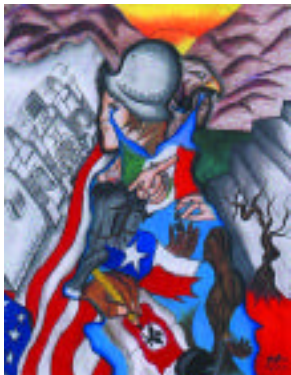
Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, by students of J.O. Wilson Elementary School 17 Myeeka Mullins 18 Kila J. Taylor 19 Luther Garvin 20 Eric Mullins
 21 Lunden Hardy 22 Andrea Simms 23 Corey Sheppard 24 Corey Sheppard 25 Ryan Ray 26 Davon Warren
 27 Davon Warren 28 Richey Yarborough 29 Briana Thompson 30 Alvin Coe 31 Oscar Vasquez
Rio Grande Basin, by students of Bowie High School 32 Arturo Montes 33 Noe Pena 34 Jose Angel Briones, Jr. 35 Jose Lopez



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River Volunteers

Volunteer support continues to be an important part of the initiative. Five national non-profit volunteer organizations have established partnerships with the initiative and provide support for communities that request assistance. The volunteer groups include the Alice Ferguson Foundation, the Garden Club of America, the National Association of Service & Conservation Corps, the National Environmental Education & Training Foundation, National Service Corps (AmeriCorps and VISTA) and the Student Conservation Association. River communities may also access Pro Bono services from the engineering firm of Camp, Dresser and McGee and the American Planning Association.

River Internships

In an effort to promote leadership diversity within the American Heritage Rivers initiative, the AHR Interagency Task Force members actively assisted qualified interns in their efforts to gain valuable experience as environmental advocates. Two AHR interns were identified by the US Environmental Protection Agency and placed with the National Park Service in Washington, DC to work on the American Heritage Rivers initiative.



[left to right] The Former AHR Interagency Task Force Chair, Loretta Neuman and Fran Eargle with interns, Amelia Blair and Zakery Bodine.

Environmental Justice Highlights

An important part of the American Heritage Rivers initiative includes promoting inclusiveness of minority and low-income communities. As part of our commitment to being “good neighbors” to our designated river communities, we work in partnership with AHR community stakeholders to promote the principles of environmental justice. With the support of the American Heritage Rivers initiative, communities that disproportionately experience negative environmental impacts, are closer to achieving their vision of environmental justice.

“Each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate disproportionately high and adverse human health and or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations.”

President Bill Clinton, Executive Order 12898



Loretta Neumann at National Park Service exhibit on Frederick Douglass.

Honoring the African-American Heritage of the Potomac Watershed

Long overlooked concerns of environmental and economic justice along the Anacostia River – part of the Potomac River Watershed – are getting priority attention through the efforts of the American Heritage Rivers initiative Task Force. Representatives of the Anacostia Historical Society and the Anacostia Garden Club appealed to the AHR Task Force, citing the shortage of funding to properly maintain the home of Frederick Douglass, Cedar Hill, overlooking the Anacostia River. Douglass, a former slave, abolitionist and leader of the Underground Railroad, became an advisor to Abraham Lincoln and other Presidents, and later, U.S. Ambassador to Haiti. The community organizations also informed the Task Force of legislation before Congress to establish the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Garden Act.

Task Force members raised both of these issues at the highest levels within the Executive Branch. Appropriate funding was included in the FY 2001 budget for structural repairs and proper maintenance Cedar Hill. On November 9, 2000, President Clinton signed the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Garden Act into law, clearing the way for the eventual clean-up of pesticide contaminated land, rehabilitation of long abandoned greenhouses, and the renovation of other structures of historical significance along the Anacostia River.



Texas border community along the Rio Grande.

Communities in Need

What are “Colonias”?

Colonias are rural communities and neighborhoods located within 150 miles of the U.S. – Mexican border. *Colonias* may be entire border communities or neighborhoods within incorporated communities. These communities typically have high rates of poverty and no formally sanctioned local governance. The residents often lack the resources to pave roads, provide sanitary water and sewer systems, decent housing, street lighting and other collective services that local governments customarily provide. As a result, *colonias* are overburdened with serious environmental and health problems. Without essential services typically provided by local government, basic infrastructure and other focused assistance, *colonias* have no hope for achieving environmental justice.

This Texas “*colonia*,” a community of low-income residents living in self-built houses on small lots, is an example of where help is needed. A focus of the Consortium of Rio Grande, (Chaired by Mayor Elizabeth Flores, Laredo, TX), is the Rio Grande Action Plan to provide needed service to these struggling subsistence communities by identifying resources to construct adequate wastewater facilities.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE INITIATIVE

Establishing a Riverkeeper Program in Louisiana

The AHR Interagency Task Force assisted a concerned community group in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in identifying federal resources for a Riverkeeper program. As a result of this effort, the Louisiana Environmental Action Network, "LEAN" applied for and was awarded a \$15,000 EPA grant to establish an Environmental Justice Riverkeeper program. LEAN will train low-income and minority residents from highly industrialized communities along the Lower Mississippi River corridor to monitor water quality.

The proposed project will address the issue of water quality between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, Louisiana. This stretch of the river known as the Industrial Corridor contains almost 150 industrial facilities. Facilities in this region release 45,589,115 pounds of toxins to surface water, or 97% of the state's surface water releases. The Riverkeeper Program targets five predominantly African American and low-income communities along the Industrial Corridor. The communities include: Convent, Geismer, Norco, Alsen and White Castle, Louisiana.



LEAN Riverkeepers on the Mississippi river in Baton Rouge, LA.

Disproportionately high levels of toxins in this and other segments of the lower Mississippi River, the primary drinking water source, have raised health and environmental concerns among residents.

The first goal of the program will be to establish a network of river communities working together to address water quality issues. Strengthening cooperation, communication and partnerships among impacted communities is a central element of the Riverkeeper program. Elected officials, and environmental justice advocates throughout the state have expressed support for the program.

"We appreciate the efforts of the AHR Interagency Task Force to help us establish the Environmental Justice Riverkeeper program and we welcome the opportunity to expand our partnerships within the initiative in the future."

Marylee Orr, Executive Director of LEAN.



"I look back at what the Mississippi River is to me, and It's the giver of life. Everything is a circle – a circle of life. That river has been around here for thousands of years, and people have been using it for thousands of years"

Jim Jones, Jr., an Ojibwe Indian Archaeologist, Leech Lake, MN

Promoting Tribal Participation and Leadership

Following the directive of the Executive Order 13084, "Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments," the AHR initiative ensured outreach with Tribal governments. As a result of these outreach efforts, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe has become the first Native American community to participate in the Upper Mississippi River AHR designation.

Representatives from the Leech Lake Band and 8 Minnesota counties will coordinate a comprehensive river management plan (CMP) created by the Mississippi Headwaters Board, the preeminent river-focused organization of the Upper Mississippi. The CMP gives the Band a key leadership role in protecting and enhancing the scientific, natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources of the Upper Mississippi River.